

Coping with Loneliness and Isolation

There are times in everyone's life when we feel lonely or isolated. It can be for straightforward reasons, like being away from home or having problems with friends and family, other times it can creep up; maybe you've spent more time at work and realised how that has affected your family and social life.

You can also feel emotionally cut off from those around you or feel alone because of what's going on in your head that you don't feel able to share with your friends or family. Even though you're physically present with these people, you don't feel able to fully open up about your feelings and experiences, and this can be isolating for you.

Times you can feel loneliness

- Having low self-esteem can make us feel lonely because we might feel we're not as good as the other people around us
- After a relationship break-up it can be difficult to adjust to life as a single person again. Spending more time on your own can feel isolating.
- When you're young, loneliness can be a big problem as it's not always easy to find a group of people you connect with or places to hang out. This can be especially true in rural or isolated communities where it might seem hard to find people who share your interests.
- No matter where you live, you can feel cut off from people at work, at school or at home.
- Unemployment might mean you're at home all day without the opportunity to make new friends and keep busy.

Common causes of loneliness

- Having a hard time with bullying or intimidation at school, college or work.
- Finding it hard to talk to others because of shyness or social anxiety.
- Living away from home for the first time.
- Friends moving away for work or other reasons.
- Growing apart from old friends or groups.
- Certain stressful events or worries can be a cause of loneliness, if you feel like you're the only person going through something or your life is different to people around you.
- Changing jobs or leaving a job you've held for a long time, and where you might have formed strong social bonds or friendship networks.

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There are lots of coping strategies for dealing with loneliness and isolation.

A lot of them depend on what the underlying cause is of these feelings. For instance, if you've moved out of home or to a different state for a new job, it's natural you'll be lonely at first. In time, it's likely that you will form new friendships and begin to be more socially active and these feelings will naturally pass.

If there's no clear reason why you feel lonely, it might be a sign something's wrong and you might benefit from support or assistance from a counsellor.



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Tips for coping with loneliness

- **Get busy.**

Keeping yourself busy is a really effective way of dealing with loneliness. If you're in a situation where you're bored or can't find a job, volunteer with something you care about or think you might be interested in. Feeling needed and useful is really important sometimes.

- **Know that you're not alone.**

Feelings of loneliness or isolation don't mean there's something wrong with you. For example, moving for work can be a scary time for anyone. Being unemployed is also stressful and everyone in your life will understand this. But while at times you life may feel very different and your future may be uncertain, remember that everyone goes through difficult periods in life but that doesn't mean they need to face these challenges on their own.

- **Boost your self-esteem.**

A lack of confidence can hold you back in social situations. Meeting new people can be stressful when you don't feel good about yourself. Think of one thing about yourself that others admire, and build on that. Remember the things that you do well and that you've been commended for in the past. You'll quickly remember that there are many things about you that are unique and impressive.

- **Explore your interests.**

Taking up a hobby you've always wanted to get into can help you combat loneliness and isolation in different ways. If you're on your own in a new place it can be a great way of meeting new people and making new friends. If you're feeling lonely for no obvious reason, taking up an evening class or sport can help take your mind off it and keeps you busy doing something productive.

- **Enjoy your own company**

It might feel weird at first if you're used to being surrounded by other people, but, spending time alone can be really liberating. The freedom to be alone with your thoughts can be a great way of winding down. Try to feel comfortable with just yourself for company.

Generally when we think of people we want to be around, they are people who have a self-assurance that is attractive to others. Learning to be on your own and like your own company is a step towards this kind of confidence.

- **Try not to worry**

Feelings of loneliness often come and go during life. Sometimes the best thing to do is accept your feelings and remember you'll probably feel better after a while. If you're lonely because you're homesick, think about the point in the future when you'll be reunited with your friends and family, and try to enjoy whatever new experiences you're having away from home in the meantime.

If you're persistently lonely for no obvious reason, it can also be a sign of depression and something you should talk about with a counsellor or a trusted friend or family member.



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Mind yourself

Sometimes when we feel lonely or isolated, we can become more vulnerable to outside influences. Here are some tips on taking care of yourself online and with social media:

- **Take what you see online with a pinch of salt**

What people put out there on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter can make us feel worse if we're feeling low. It can seem like everyone is having more fun with more friends than you, that they're at every festival or having crazy nights out or living it up with a glamorous, unattainable lifestyle. This feeds our feelings of inadequacy and leads to a Fear-Of-Missing-Out.

Studies have shown that many social media users find apps like Facebook and Instagram can have a significant impact on their mental health because of the distorted view of their friends and families' lifestyles it presents.

But remember, people only publish 'the best' of themselves and often this is an exaggeration or a complete fabrication, so try not to get sucked into a spiral of envy looking at other people's photos and posts.

It's also important to remember that social media is often used to generate outrage and conflict by people who are looking for drama in their lives to entertain themselves with. It's important not to take what gets said on social media too seriously or to let any arguments online affect your mental health in the real world.

- **Don't become too dependent**

While online communities can be a great social outlet, don't become too dependent on them. Make sure you balance your social life and make the effort to talk to people in person. Sometimes you can strike up deep and lasting friendships with people you come in to contact with online, but it's important to maintain your real world relationships too.

- **Build trust gradually**

Sometimes when you're lonely, you can place too much weight on new friendships and relationships. Build trust gradually, take it slow and accept your new friend as they are.

Take your time with new relationships. Friendships can take time to build on both sides and you don't want to find that you have invested too heavily in a new friendship or relationship if it isn't reciprocated.

Sometimes the strong emotional rewards of diving headfirst in to a new, strong friendship can be intoxicating, but it's important to ensure your new friendships are sustainable and healthy relationships that will stand the test of time.

What Hunterlink can do

We know it can be a daunting process to pick up the phone when you are already dealing with feelings of loneliness or isolation, but please know that we are here for you 24/7 with our fully qualified and registered counsellors ready to help you anytime of the day or night.

We provide confidential telephone or face-to-face support sessions, as well as access to these services for immediate family members.

Remember, you don't have to be in a crisis situation to contact Hunterlink.

